

**Co-Chair's****Summary****Working Group Session of the Women, Peace, and Security Focal Points Network:  
Building Peace: Taking Action to Support Women Peacebuilders**

Co-hosted by Uruguay and Canada  
Online Zoom Meeting Format  
Wednesday, September 9, 2020  
10:00 – 12:00 (EDT /New York)

**Introduction:**

This summary provides highlights from the September 9, 2020 working group session of the Women, Peace, and Security Focal Points Network (WPS-FPN) hosted by Co-Chairs Canada and Uruguay. The design of the session encouraged participants, including Focal Points and women peacebuilders, to discuss concrete steps to increase support, protections, and funding for women peacebuilders. The working group was organized in response to the United Nations Secretary General (UNSG) 2019 [report](#) on Women, Peace, and Security (WPS), which called for increased support and protections for women peacebuilders, who face occurrences of physical and sexual violence, intimidation and discrimination, online attacks, and other abuses. 70+ members of the Focal Points Network participated, along with women peacebuilder guest speakers and panelist who offered their own recommendations on improving support and protections.

The Chatham House Rule was invoked, allowing participants to engage in open discourse. The discussion began with a panel discussion hosting four women peacebuilders working on the frontlines to share their perspectives on how funding and protections can be improved. Participants were then split into four breakout groups, where facilitator focussed the discussion on two main themes:

- *Strengthening support for women peacebuilders through funding and partnership-building*
- *Ensuring greater protection of women peacebuilders on the frontlines*

**SESSION HIGHLIGHTS:****Key Points Raised:***Funding and Partnerships*

- Improve coordination between Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and donors to create equal ownership, decrease competition for funds amongst CSOs, and avoid overlap of project funding.
- Extend funding beyond the focus on “conflict-affected” states to support women peacebuilders working on conflict prevention.
- Improve visibility and recognition for women peacebuilders by:
  - Mapping women peacebuilders and CSOs and their work; and
  - Increasing networking opportunities for women peacebuilders.
- Utilize bilateral aid to pressure governments to allocate additional funding for WPS agenda and women peacebuilders.
- Allocate funding for local WPS priorities rather than focussing on donor-driven agendas.
- Focus funding on improving institutional strength and sustainability of CSOs rather than primarily on project output.

- Work to reach local grassroots organizations and women peacebuilders by making application processes more accessible and offering institutional support to build their capacity.
- Make use of pool funding mechanisms with multiple funding streams for different response mechanisms (ie. Women Peace and Humanitarian Fund).
- Diversify donors by increasing outreach on WPS agenda (ie. private sector donors).
- Increase donor flexibility to shift funds in cases of crises and emergency.

#### *Protections for Women on the Frontlines*

- Create internationally recognized definition of peacebuilders and expand eligibility criteria for existing protection mechanisms to include them.
- Work with CSOs and local security sectors to understand threats faced by women peacebuilders and strengthen existing protection mechanisms.
- Advocate for continued national level operation of human rights accountability mechanisms (ie. UN commission of Inquiry and the Office of the UN Human Rights Commission).
- Support existing CSO early warning mechanisms and evacuation networks (formal and informal).
- Pressure governments to respect human rights by making human rights a condition to foreign aid and holding violators accountable.
- Strengthen networks of collaboration between women peacebuilders, including creating opportunities for regional and cross-regional exchange.

#### **REPORT:**

##### **Opening Remarks:**

Noelia Martinez-Franchi shared opening remarks as Uruguay's WPS Focal Point and Director of Multilateral Affairs at the Uruguayan Ministry of Foreign Affairs. She underscored the importance of hearing directly from women peacebuilders on the ground and gaining firsthand knowledge on how to improve their access to government support. She expressed her hope that lessons learned from these working groups will foster more cohesive and efficient implementation of Resolution 1325 to achieve greater protections and support for women peacebuilders.

Noting the record levels of political violence against women, Gwyneth Kutz, Canada's WPS Focal point and Director General of the Peace and Stabilization Operations Programs at Global Affairs Canada, highlighted the urgent need to address these threats and improve access to funding for women peacebuilders. Citing the United Nations Secretary General (UNSG) 2019 [report](#) on Women, Peace, and Security (WPS), she reiterated that only 0.2 per cent of total bilateral aid to fragile and conflict-affected states goes directly to women's organizations, and stressed the need to respond to the report's call for action. She commended this learning opportunity to engage with women peacebuilders and thanked them for their vital contributions.

##### **Panel Discussion:**

Ambassador to Canada for Uruguay, Ambassador Martin Vidal, hosted a panel of four women peacebuilders working on the frontlines for opening discussion. Each of the panelists were given four minutes to respond to the following question:

*"What can governments do to improve funding for and protection of women peacebuilders?"*

The panelist offered direct answers to the question, highlighting key strategies that can be implemented to improve protections and funding and drawing from their own experience to pinpoint the particular needs of women peacebuilders on the ground.

### **Key Points from Panel Discussion:**

#### *Improving protections:*

- Increase representation and recognition of women peacebuilders and their work to improve protections through increasing their legitimacy.
- Ensure bilateral partners are respecting human rights and protections.
- Create evacuation mechanisms for women peacebuilders and their families facing immediate threats such as short term visas with neighboring countries or stipends for internal relocation.
- Increase actions to stop the manufacture and export of illegal weapons.
- Offer PTSD and mental healthcare support for women peacebuilders.
- Offer direct aid to protective community structures to improve their capacity,
- Provide technological tools (ie. cellphones, Whatsapp) to women peacebuilders to structure early warning mechanisms.
- Recognize cyber smear campaigns as serious crimes and implement mechanisms to respond to online threats against women peacebuilders.
- Increase accountability for Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) by:
  - Making use of international justice avenues such as use of Universal Jurisdiction; and
  - Offering support in collecting evidence for SGBV crimes.

#### *Improving Funding and Support:*

- Make use of existing mechanisms such as the International Civil Society Action Network's (ICAN) Innovative Peace Fund – a multi-donor, global grant making mechanism to support women-led peacebuilding organizations.
- Place additional accountability on international organizations on the use of funds.
- Transfer program management responsibilities to local women peacebuilders.
- Offer direct funding for local women peacebuilders and locally led initiatives.
- Create rapid response funds for emergency protection needs.
- Provide life insurance and healthcare for women peacebuilders.
- Expand the WPS agenda framework to apply to non-traditional conflicts.

### **Breakout Groups:**

#### **Funding and Partnerships (Groups 1 & 2)**

As cited in the [2019 UNSG report](#), only 0.2 per cent of total bilateral aid to fragile and conflict-affected states goes directly to women's organisations. Within the working groups, groups 1 and 2 focussed primarily on two core questions:

*What are some of the barriers faced by women peacebuilders and women-led peacebuilding organisations in obtaining adequate and sustainable funding?*

*What concrete steps can be taken by FPN members to address these funding barriers?*

### **Discussion:**

### *Funding structures*

One barrier noted for access to funding was the transactional and hierarchical nature of funding partnerships. Participants noted the need to create collaborative and trust-based partnerships in which donors and CSOs have equal ownership of the process.

A key suggestion included making use of funding pools such as the Women Peace and Humanitarian Fund. This allows for donations to go to multiple funding streams including rapid response and emergency response funding streams.

### *Grassroots Outreach*

Multiple participants emphasized the need for donations to reach smaller grassroots organizations and locally engaged women peacebuilders. Outreach suggestions included the use of funding pools within larger organizations that can act as consorts in distributing funds to grassroots organizations. Improving access to application processes for donations was also highlighted as a key method to engaging smaller organizations. This included simplifying the process, offering support to organizations applying, and ensuring that applications are offered in local languages.

### *Conflict Response vs. Conflict Prevention*

Participants noted that donors should avoid focussing funding exclusively to traditionally “conflict-affected” states or as an immediate response to conflict and instead expanding funding opportunities to women peacebuilders working on conflict prevention. By offering funding to CSOs in non-conflict states, donors can build sustainable funding partnerships and create early warning mechanisms for potential conflict by engaging the women peacebuilders who mitigate conflict at the community levels.

### *Visibility and Recognition*

Failure to obtain adequate and sustainable funding was also linked to lack of visibility and recognition for women peacebuilders. One recommendation to help increase visibility included conducting a “landscape analysis”. This was a successful strategy implemented by US missions, in which a “map” was created highlighting the work of women peacebuilders and their organizations within a country. This map was distributed to like-minded missions, providing the international donor community with information on women peacebuilders within the country and what they were working on to foster opportunities for funding.

It was also noted that missions can act as conveners by hosting CSOs and women peacebuilders to meet with mission staff and the international community. This provides opportunities for networking and engaging with the international community.

### *Donor Responsibility*

One CSO representative noted that the scarcity of funds creates competition among CSOs. International donations can often overlap and be directed at the most visible CSOs. To address this problem, it was suggested that donors should coordinate their efforts in collaboration with CSO networks. By doing so, they can work to strengthen the capacity of multiple CSOs working within a diverse range of sectors, which in turn decreases animosity/competition and strengthens collaboration between CSOs. Another point made was the need for donors to be flexible to allow for shifting in funds in cases of crisis and emergency.

Participants also pointed out that bilateral donors can leverage donations to influence governments to direct additional funds towards the WPS agenda and local CSOs. Furthermore, donors must engage with CSOs to understand local funding priorities for WPS rather than implementing donor-driven agendas. It was also noted that investing in improving the overall capacity of CSOs is crucial for improving institutional strength and sustainability. Additionally, donors should attempt to break the system of funding through silos, as women peacebuilders and CSOs often engage in multi-dimensional responses to WPS issues.

### **Protection on the Frontlines (Groups 3 & 4)**

As cited in the [2019 UNSG report](#) on WPS, women peacebuilders face physical and online threats, violence, and other abuses. This group focussed on responding to the following question:

*What are the concrete steps for FPN members to address these threats and violence?*

#### **Discussion:**

##### *Definitions and Protections Eligibility*

Experts noted the need to expand the scope of eligibility for existing protection mechanisms for human rights defenders, as women peacebuilders sometimes do not fit the eligibility criteria. This can be addressed through clear international recognition and definition of peacebuilders (including women peacebuilders) which can be included in the eligibility for existing protections. International guidelines on the protections of women peacebuilders must also be created. These definitions and guidelines must be devised in consultation with women peacebuilders to ensure they are inclusive.

##### *Protection Mechanisms on the Ground*

Participants noted the benefits of strengthening existing protection tools such as the Generation Equality Forum, Global Compact for WPS, and humanitarian action. Speakers also emphasized advocating for continued national level operation of human rights accountability mechanisms such as the UN Commission of Inquiry and the Office of the UN Human Rights Commission.

For direct protection response, speakers noted that Focal Point Missions / HOMs should make efforts to maintain open lines of communication with women peacebuilders and CSOs in case of threats. One speaker offered an example in which embassies met with one Focal Point for CSOs to share information on threats regularly. The speaker noted that having a Focal Point CSO representative that would meet with multiple embassy representatives together allowed for optimal information sharing while using less resources.

Participants noted that Focal Points and their missions should work to recognize and strengthen existing informal networks including early warning / evacuation networks and rapid response mechanisms. Early warning mechanisms allow CSOs to inform those at risk when outbursts of violence occur (ie. police use of force/crackdowns on activists). In cases where state security sectors are reliable, they can be included in the creation of these alert and evacuation networks.

##### *Donor Country*

CSO representatives noted that foreign embassies and international allies must use their influence to pressure governments to respect human rights and condemn human rights abuses to protect women peace builders. They indicated that donor countries can make the protection of peacebuilders and human

rights a condition to foreign aid and include accountability measures to ensure that human rights are respected. Participants also emphasized that donor countries should consider allocating a portion foreign aid to go directly to civil society, and encourage coordination between peacebuilders in donor capitals and peacebuilders in recipient countries to monitor use of foreign aid

### *Networking Opportunities*

Strong networks of collaboration between women peacebuilders are crucial in creating adequate support systems in times of threat. Speakers pointed to the fact that FPN states can work to strengthen those networks and offer spaces for engagement between women peacebuilders and CSOs. They can also offer women peacebuilders opportunities for networking, including with state representatives and in cross-regional exchanges between women peacebuilders. Women peacebuilders can make use of regional and multi-lateral institutions to share lessons learned and effective tools to increase safety.

### **Concluding Session:**

In concluding the working group, rapporteurs from each breakout group presented key outcomes of their discussions, including the best practices and recommendations shared by Focal Points and guest speakers. Martin Vidal, ambassador of Uruguay in Canada, offered final words commending participants and emphasizing the benefits of this type of open and frank dialogue.

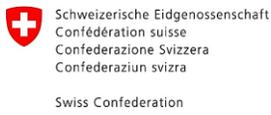
### **Background**

The Women, Peace and Security Focal Points Network was launched in September 2016 as a unique forum for national and regional representatives (Focal Points) to share best practices and lessons learned on the WPS agenda. There are 87 members of the Network from UN member states and regional organizations. The Focal Points are responsible for WPS implementation (frequently through national action plans and strategies on WPS) within their respective governments and regional organizations. The UN and civil society also play an active role in the Network, with UN Women serving as Secretariat.

Canada and Uruguay are Co-Chairs of the WPS Focal Points Network for 2020 – the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of landmark UNSC Resolution 1325, the first of 10 UNSC resolutions that form the WPS agenda. Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the annual capital-based Network meeting scheduled to take place in Ottawa on 12-13 May 2020 will transition to a series of online engagements over the spring, summer and fall. These online sessions will focus on two main themes for this year's Network discussions: supporting and protecting women peacebuilders, and the power of impact-driven national action plans.



*This friendship symbol celebrates the partnership of Canada and Uruguay as Co-Chairs of the WPS Focal Points Network in 2020 and represents the spirit of collaboration and cooperation. Designed by Uruguayan graphic designer, Gabriel Benderski, the symbol is also inspired by the indigenous Bunchberry*



*flowering plant found in all regions of Canada and the combined color palette of the Canadian and Uruguayan national flags.*